Town hall meetings can be an effective approach to educating a community about a particular issue, such as HPV and cervical cancer, while also engaging constituents in identifying and using prevention measures and community-based resources. Hosting a town hall can also help legislators connect with their constituents and gain further insight into the thoughts and concerns of the individuals they represent.

The format of a town hall can vary, from a panel discussion or presentation to a roundtable or open-microphone community forum. Below you will find ten key steps for hosting a town hall meeting to insure that the event runs as smoothly as possible.

1. **Plan and Designate Tasks**

No town hall meeting can be complete without a list of goals to accomplish. Smart planning includes well-delineated tasks, assigned deadlines, and responsible person(s) designated to follow through with the tasks. Based on the goals, consider the following questions:

- What topics will be highlighted?
- What kind of speakers and panels will there be?
- What is the best location to have the town hall meeting? Remember, it is important that the venue is politically neutral and can hold the expected number of attendees.
- What materials will be distributed to attendees? This can be the meeting agenda, community newsletter, informational material or pamphlets.

From the onset, it is important to discuss the town hall topics and decide how to reach participants and engage various groups in the community. Additionally, listing and designating responsibilities for event planning, programmatic details, and media outreach early on will make for a more efficient planning process.

2. **Brainstorm for Support**

Planning a town hall meeting is a multi-faceted endeavor that requires well-choreographed collaboration from all involved. Contact local entities, such as the Office of Women’s Health, or any of the partners listed on Women In Government’s Partners and Resources page within this toolkit, for tips on hosting a town hall or for help locating speakers. It is also helpful to make a list of contacts that can help with the town hall such as:

- Potential Speakers List
- Elected and Appointed Officials
3. Check-off the Logistics

There are a lot of things to consider in the logistics of a town hall meeting. Be sure to stay on top of the tasks well before the event. Consider each of the items below.

- **Select a date, time, and duration** for the town hall meeting. During session, town halls are typically on a Monday or Friday. Remember that certain times of year may be subject to inopportune weather.

- **Location:** The location must be politically neutral and is able to hold the expected number of attendees. Keep in mind access to parking and public transportation. Consider locations that are wheelchair accessible. Also note that your location can determine the kind of audience you attract.

  Town Hall Location Ideas: Park District; Public Library; Township Hall; Village Hall; Community College; Community Organizations; Local Schools; Community Gardens; and Churches or Places of Worship.

- **Material Items:** Decide how much of your budget to allocate for flyers, mailings, and other materials. Draft an agenda and prepare fact sheets about HPV and cervical cancer to distribute to attendees.
  - Invitations
  - Agenda
  - Community Resources Flyers & Brochures
  - Fact Sheets

  Organizations throughout the community can provide brochures and flyers about HPV and cervical cancer. Determine which organizations can provide material.


  The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a number of fact sheets which can be accessed at [http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/).
4. Gather Data

Research HPV and cervical cancer thoroughly, developing several key areas you would like to discuss. Be prepared to present facts, figures, and information. Also prepare to discuss multiple aspects of this topic, including any dissenting opinion on cervical cancer screening or HPV vaccination.

Women In Government has a variety of resources to help legislators host a town hall meeting, many of which can be found throughout our HPV & Cervical Cancer Awareness & Education Toolkit. Women In Government can also provide state-specific materials by request. Feel free to contact us for help with your town hall needs at policy@womeningovernment.org or 202-333-0825.

5. Set an Agenda and Find Speakers

Traditionally, a town hall speaker forum includes a panel of experts, such as women’s health educators, health professionals, and patient advocates that provide information to constituents. For potential speakers who can contribute to the panel, please contact the partners on the Partners and Resources page of this toolkit. Once appropriate speakers are found, send a formal invitation and ask them to share their knowledge on a particular aspect of HPV and cervical cancer in your community.

The typical town hall agenda might include:

- Legislator introduction and overview (10 minutes)
- Panel presentations (20-30 minutes)
  - Healthcare professional – HPV and cervical cancer overview, symptoms, risk factors, prevention, detection, and treatment (15-20 minutes)
  - Advocacy volunteer – Resources in the community (10-15 minutes)
- Question and Answer with Attendees (25 minutes or more)
- Legislator wrap-up and thank you (5 minutes)

6. Craft a Media Strategy

Before the Town Hall Meeting

Attracting the media can help the town hall gain a larger audience. Make sure to create a press release along with an invitation to the event. Invite your local television and radio stations to attend. Place announcements in your local newspapers and magazines. Use social media to get the message out. Call your local public broadcasting stations, Univision, Telemundo, and other stations in the area.
During and After the Town Hall Meeting

Make sure that during the event, a section is reserved for media members. Determine if the media require additional equipment such as risers or a melt box for camera crews. Additionally, having someone photograph or videotape the town hall is a good idea for later use. The video can be posted on the Internet or used in other related presentations. If some of the media representatives were unable to attend, offer to send a press release after the town hall meeting complete with pictures.

7. Engage the Community

How will the community know about the HPV and Cervical Cancer Awareness and Education Town Hall? This is the opportunity to be creative and reach out to constituents. Networking with existing local organizations is the best way to reach potential attendees. Make presentations about HPV and cervical cancer to local clubs or women’s groups. Network with non-profit organizations and reach their members. Talk to faculty and staff at the local colleges or universities and inform student organizations of the town hall. Put flyers up throughout the area including churches, coffee shops, bookstores, libraries, restaurants, and grocery stores. Reach out to diverse groups throughout the area so that your attendees can offer feedback based on diverse perspectives.

8. Hold the Town Hall Meeting

The day of the town hall meeting may be stressful but the best way to avoid additional stress is to arrive at the event location early. Check to see that all resource tables are set-up. Ensure that the space for the panel is set-up and bottled water is available for speakers. Ensure there are enough copies of resources, such as the agenda and fact sheets, available to attendees. If other organizations have brochures to distribute, ensure there is enough space for their information as well. Ensure that the media equipment is in place for the press. If you have a photographer or videographer, make sure the photographer is taking pictures throughout the event. Lastly, a survey asking about the effectiveness of the town hall speakers, as well as potential topics about HPV and cervical cancer that the attendees would like to know more about, can inform you where knowledge gaps exist in the community and gauge town hall success.
9. Thank Sponsors and Supporters

The town hall meeting is now over and the event would not have been possible without the help of community sponsors, organizations, and volunteers. Make sure to send thank you letters to key participants, speakers, and contacts. This will help continue positive relationships with key players who fight against HPV and cervical cancer in the district.

10. Develop a Plan to Address HPV and Cervical Cancer

A successful town hall keeps issues pertaining to HPV and cervical cancer fresh in the minds of community members. It is important to consider information from the town hall meeting and develop an action plan. Consider developing an ad hoc task force primarily to follow up on town hall recommendations. Speakers could potentially play a role in leading the task force. Community volunteers and organizations can begin to take action and keep HPV and cervical cancer, as well as women’s health, in the forefront of the community.
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<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>PERSON RESPONSIBLE</th>
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| 2 MONTHS (OR LONGER) PRIOR | ○ Pick date and time  
○ Brainstorm potential speakers to contact  
○ Reserve location for event  
○ Advertise event (agenda, flyers, mailings, newsletters, social media, etc.)  
○ Arrange media coverage of town hall | |
| WITHIN 1 MONTH PRIOR | ○ Final reminder for speakers and contacts  
○ Final round of advertisement activities  
○ Continue to network with the community | |
| DAY OF | ○ Arrive early at event location to set up resource table  
○ Distribute copies of agenda and evaluation survey to attendees  
○ Take pictures during town hall | |
| AFTER | ○ Send follow-up thank you communications to participants and key contacts  
○ Develop and distribute press release about event  
○ Look through evaluation surveys to gauge event success  
○ Create an action plan for the community | |